

The
Melville Society
N E W S L E T T E R

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The 1959 annual meeting of the society is scheduled to be held on Monday afternoon, December 28, in Room 9 of the Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, from 2:15 to 3:30 o'clock. Since the meeting will be an important one, it is hoped that as many members as possible will attend.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

To the Members:

Acting Secretary Tyrus Hillway has asked me to write some of the material for this issue of the *Newsletter*, and I do so gladly. It gives me an opportunity to register a plea for as strong an attendance as possible at the annual meeting in Chicago. This will be a decision-making meeting, and some of the decisions seem sure to be important to the future of the Society and Melville scholarship. Quite naturally, we want everyone who can to be in on the planning.

For one thing, we must elect a secretary to take on the job which Tyrus has carried so long and so well. The truth is that he has genially stayed in harness beyond the terminal date of his resignation simply because his replacement has not been chosen by the membership, and we have called on him for more than one issue of the *Newsletter*, and then one more. At this point he deserves a break.

For another, there is an open question as to whether the objectives and hence the nature of the *Newsletter* should be changed. It could easily become a clearing house for Melville scholarship, reviews, and bibliography and so serve an important function for others as well as the Society. There is even the possibility that it could be one of the first of a new kind of instrument which seems to be more and more needed in scholarship now. As it becomes harder and harder to read the doctoral dissertations and to keep up with the work that is being carried on, we may need a definitive periodical on works in progress which reports the work in abstracts.

Finally, we will ask the membership to consider the advisability of establishing a Committee on Publications. At the moment, Melville publication is almost entirely determined by the publishers.

What comes out, when, and how well it is edited are largely matters of what publisher thinks he can sell Melville and how much he wants to put into it. Among the publishers there is little or no coordination; certainly there is no long-range planning. The Society has one thing the publishers need, and that is the editors. It is possible that a committee formed by the Society might bring some pressure to bear which would help the situation.

Not all the meeting will be work, however. Walt Bezanson is going to present a paper on some of the things he has discovered while editing *Clarel*, and Phil Durham will talk on Weaver and the early editions.

Once again, let me enjoin you to be there if you can.

Lawrence Barrett
President

THE SOMERS MUTINY

Of particular interest to our members is the publication this autumn of *The Somers Mutiny Affair*, by Harrison Hayford, one of a series of "guided research" projects being sponsored by Prentice-Hall, Inc. A brochure describing the book is included with this issue. Hayford has reprinted all the important source materials which throw light on the mutiny and the hanging of the three chief conspirators. He has included also a number of comments by the press and by such prominent citizens as Cooper to show the agitation which the affair caused among the public. The book should serve as a welcome addition to the materials now available for a thorough study of *Billy Budd* and some of Melville's other writings.

MELVILLE, 1890 - 1920

Max Putzel has undertaken to investigate the period between Melville's death in 1891 and the beginning of the Melville revival after World War I. Melville's reputation during this period is largely a mystery to modern scholars. During the 1890's the American Publishers' Corporation, presumably with the help of Mrs. Melville, issued a number of Melville's works — with what success is not entirely clear at present.

As an addition to the Melville Log, Putzel cites a review of *Moby-Dick* by Alexander de Menil which appeared in the St. Louis quarterly, *The Hesperian*, in the spring of 1897 (I, 497). "Herman Melville's novels, it would seem, have not as yet entirely gone out of print," de Menil remarked with some appearance of surprise. Reviewing the 1896 edition of *Moby-Dick*, he seems to have depended for many of his comments upon the publisher's "blurb," and he quoted from a Dublin review of the first edition. Remembering hazily that Melville's death occurred sometime "early in the nineties," he spoke of *Moby-Dick* with what may be described as restrained enthusiasm, qualifying it with this comment: "Nevertheless, the book is very extravagant in many of its incidents."

NOTES

No doubt most of our members have seen the handsome, full-page advertisement which the Steuben Glass Company has recently been running in one or more of the national magazines. The advertisement pictures the figure of a breaching whale, a whaleboat with steersman, rowers, and harpooner (the harpooner with one leg), and a base representing an ocean wave — all in glass. The design, created by Donald Pollard (glass designer) and Sidney Waugh (engraving designer) is called *Moby Dick*. It is, of course, idealized rather than anatomically and cetologically accurate. The length is eleven inches. Cost (each), \$3,500.

The Melville bibliography recently issued by the Society was listed among new publications in the November 2 number of the *publishers' Weekly*. Incidentally, persons wishing to secure copies of the bibliography should apply to the acting secretary rather than to the Providence Public Library. Those ordering should include the price of one dollar per copy plus thirty cents for postage and handling.

At a dinner meeting recently the acting secretary was taken by surprise when he was introduced as secretary, not of the Melville Society, but of the Izaak Walton League. The introducer explained, on being informed of his error,

that at least he knew the organization had something to do with fish!

The principal attraction at the Pleasure Island amusement park in Wakefield, Massachusetts, is a "Moby Dick Ride." The visitor is taken aboard a 29-foot "whaleboat" through "shark-infested" waters. At the climax of his ride he sights a replica of *Moby Dick*, forty-five feet long, made of steel and fibreglass. The whale surfaces, charges the boat, and then sounds at a safe distance. Pleasure Island is reached via Exit 21-A on Route 128.

Alan Villiers describes his exciting (though frustrating) experiences as the skipper of the reconstructed and barely maneuverable *Pequod* for the John Huston motion picture production of *Moby Dick* in his most recent book, *Give Me A Ship to Sail* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959). In the first two chapters (the remainder of the book being concerned with other adventures) he calls the job, the weather in the Irish Sea, and the ship itself "somehow most melancholy!"

As an out-of-the-way reference to Melville, Norman Jarrard mentions praise of Melville's writing (presumably *Typee*) in an 1847 letter of a Baltimore woman included among the Anne P. Smith (of Norfolk) papers in the Duke University Library. Jarrard is working on a new critical text of Melville's poems.

Correction: Richard H. Fogle's forthcoming book on Melville's tales (University of Oklahoma Press) is not an edition of the tales, as was indicated in a recent *Newsletter*, but a series of explicatory critiques. Incidentally, the Melville bibliography failed to mention three of Fogle's articles on Melville: "Melville's *Bartleby*: Absolutism, Predestination, and Free Will," *Tulane Studies in English*, IV (1954), 125-135; "The Unity of Melville's 'The Encantadas'," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, X (1955), 34-52; and *Billy Budd* — Acceptance or Irony, "Tulane Studies in English, VIII (1958), 107-113.

Until further notice, dues for membership will continue to be accepted by the acting secretary, Tyrus Hillway, Colorado State College, Greeley, Colorado.

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER
IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY FOR MEMBERS OF THE
Melville Society, a group of literary scholars and others interested
in the life and works of Herman Melville. The Society seeks to
facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to
stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to encourage
literary, historical, and bibliographical research. Membership is
two dollars per year and includes all services of the Society. Asso-
ciate membership (non-voting) is one dollar per year and includes
all issues of the Newsletter. Address Tyrus Hillway, acting sec-
retary, at Colorado State College, Greeley, Colorado.